

Facts and True Propositions

Presented at New England Pragmatists Forum October 16, 2015

Richard Kenneth Atkins

atkinsri@bc.edu

Wright's Argument

Negation Equivalence ("It is true that <not-P> iff it is not true that <P>")

$$(1) T\neg\phi \leftrightarrow \neg T\phi$$

$$(1a) T\neg\phi \rightarrow \neg T\phi$$

$$(1b) \neg T\phi \rightarrow T\neg\phi$$

Principle of Epistemic Constraint ("If P is true, then evidence is [in principle] available that it is so")

$$(2) T\phi \rightarrow E\phi$$

With substitution instances, it follows that:

$$(3) E\phi \vee E\neg\phi$$

I.e. for any proposition, either evidence is available for it or evidence is available for its negation. Why is that conclusion untenable? (1) There are facts beyond the ken of discovery. (2) Some propositions are undecidable even with all the evidence (generalized continuum hypothesis). (3) There are propositions for which there is no fact of the matter and so there can be no evidence for or against it, e.g. judgments of taste (my focus, but what I say will bear on (2) but not on (1)).

What To Do?

Option One: Deny judgments of taste are propositional. My position: This is not available to the pragmatist.

Option Two: Wright's proposal: "[I]n order to sustain the claim of our two pragmatist proposals [Peirce's and Putnam's]—and indeed any broadly Dummettian antirealist proposal—to offer defensible conceptions of truth, the associated package must include revisions of classical logic *of a broadly intuitionistic sort*" (2001, 766). My position: There is no "correct" logic (intuitionist or classical, e.g.), but it is not desirable to be committed to a rejection of classical logic.

Option Three: My position: Restrict bivalence and contravariance to truth-apt propositions and maintain that a proposition is truth-apt only if it or its negation represents (or is or corresponds to, etc.) a fact. How does this stop the inference? The use of substitution instances already presumes there is some fact of the matter the proposition represents, and so the substitution is legitimate only if there is some fact of the matter. But is there some fact of the matter? Only inquiry could help us tell, hence the priority of the pragmatic conception of truth. Put another way: classical bivalent logic is a logic of facts. This leads to problem (1) above.